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Office of the  
Assistant  
Secretary of  
Administration

# USDA Management Report for 1988



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The Department's efforts under the USDA 1988-89 Management Plan focused on Governmentwide goals and strategies related to credit management, financial management, productivity improvement, improved services through technology, procurement reform, and general management of Government operations. Many of our goals for improving management in USDA were met through the collective efforts of Agency officials and their support personnel. This 1988 Management Report reflects many of their accomplishments.

Over the past several years, USDA employees have done an outstanding job to streamline and modernize the management of the Department. In the coming years, as we move toward "paperless" administrative processes, USDA will continue to streamline operations by expanding and updating systems through use of advancing technology and cooperative processing.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "John J. Franke, Jr." in a cursive style.

JOHN J. FRANKE, JR.  
Assistant Secretary  
for Administration



## Financial Management

### USDA's Cross-Servicing Program

In the early 1960s, USDA established the National Finance Center (NFC) to develop, maintain and operate a Departmentwide automated, centralized payroll/personnel processing system for its 38 Agencies. At that time, Agencies were operating 87 payroll offices and 130 personnel offices. In the following years, the NFC administrative system responsibilities were expanded to also include administrative payments, property, billings and collections, and accounting. These new systems replaced separate systems previously operated by USDA Agencies. Annual savings of over 1,000 staff years and \$20 million were achieved within USDA through centralization of these systems.

A proven record of lowering costs, while improving services in USDA, cross-servicing attracted interest throughout the Government. In 1983, USDA provided cross-servicing to its first external Agency—the Department of Education. Because of USDA's deep commitment to the President's Management Improvement Program, cross-servicing became a key element to streamline administrative processes that control money, information, personnel and property of the Federal Government. Thus, USDA began to actively market cross-servicing of its automated financial management services to other Federal Agencies.

Today, the NFC is providing cross-servicing to all USDA Agencies and 20 other Federal Agencies. The Treasury Department's decision to procure payroll/personnel services from USDA will result in the Department's largest cross-servicing agreement. With 180,000 employees, the Treasury payroll will double the number of employees being paid from the NFC.

The NFC processes yearly over 16 million financial transactions, disbursing \$6.7 billion, and collecting

over \$365 million on behalf of its clients. The work includes:

- Payrolling an average of 170,000 Federal employees worldwide every 2 weeks;
- Processing over \$2 billion annually in payments to vendors and others;
- Handling over one million collections transactions and tens of millions of accounting transactions; and
- Providing property management information on over one million inventory items valued at more than \$1 billion.

Cross-servicing directly benefits customer Agencies, saves money for the Federal Government by avoiding duplication, and helps USDA Agencies by spreading fixed costs over a larger base. Through various cross-servicing initiatives, USDA has already saved the Government and taxpayers over \$16.5 million by reducing the operating costs of other Agencies and eliminating duplicate development efforts. Processing cost savings to other Federal Agencies totalled about \$2.7 million for Fiscal Years' (FY) 1984 through 1988. Cross-servicing income is expected to be at least \$7 million for FY 1988, with combined annual savings to USDA and non-USDA users of about \$3.3 million.

Cross-servicing not only provides many cost savings benefits, but has created a valuable exchange of information. Today, the Federal Government is collectively working to do business more efficiently and effectively. In the future, USDA will continue to enhance its systems by developing more on-line capabilities; thus, giving all users better access to and management of their data.

### Writeoff of Uncollectible Debt

In Fiscal Years' (FY) 1987 and 1988, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) committed itself to accelerate writeoffs of uncollectible debt. The Administrator issued several directives to the field enunciating FmHA policy to review the portfolio

and purge it of debts that should be written off. The Administrator also extended authority to State Directors to approve writeoffs of any magnitude, rather than referring large amounts to the National Office for concurrence.

In response to this commitment, the FmHA wrote off \$972 million of uncollectible debt in FY 1987. For FY 1988, FmHA writeoffs totaled \$1.8 billion, exceeding the FY 1987 level by almost 100 percent. FmHA alone exceeded the Office of Management and Budget writeoff target established for the entire Department of Agriculture for FY 1988.

### Automated Claims System

Historically, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service/Commodity Credit Corporation (ASCS/CCC) has placed significant emphasis on the management of its loan portfolio. Under a strong and aggressive credit management and debt collection program, the ASCS implemented an automated claims system. This is the first such automated system in the Federal Government.

The need for the new automated system became extremely clear in the early 1980s when the farm economy plummeted and the CCC experienced an increase in the volume and dollar amount of delinquent debt owed by farmers and producers. County offices experienced a significant increase in claims processing workload, and maintaining adequate controls on the increased volume of delinquent debt became extremely cumbersome using the existing antiquated system.

The new system enables the Agency to implement new debt management techniques and strategies required by Treasury and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and provides for more timely and accurate reporting of annual credit activities to OMB, Treasury, and other creditor agencies, such as the Office of General Counsel, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Department of Justice. It also ensures the accuracy of central claims data through the use of edit checks and a system architecture which reduces manual

processing. This is extremely important because of the sensitivity of the data involved.

Through the use of a central database in the Kansas City Management Office, the ASCS is now more responsive generally and is able to provide more timely and accurate data analysis and reporting, increased collection efficiency and accuracy, and more timely follow-up.

#### **Recreation User Fee Incentives**

Late in 1987, Congress amended the Land and Water Conservation Act to allow any agency to place recreation user fees into a special fund to be used for maintenance at the facility where collected. The Forest Service collects close to \$8 million in recreation user fees, and even though this is not a very large amount in terms of the total recreation operation and maintenance needs, it could provide an incentive package, if properly managed.

Since Congress chose not to return the recreation user fee dollars to the Agency, above that appropriated for operation and maintenance, the Forest Service has developed an incentive program to deal with this situation.

The Forest Service calculated fees collected and distributed them as "off the top money" to the areas where the user fees were collected. This is expected to be the needed spark that will focus additional attention on assessing and collecting fair recreation user fees. It is also expected to enhance customer satisfaction, as the focus will now be to improve those facilities that are the most popular. Generally, users accept fees as long as they feel that they are returned to the site for their benefit and this will also result in other management improvements.

#### **Thrift Savings Plan Topped \$2 Billion Mark; System Development Continued**

The infant Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), which posted its first contributions in April 1987, topped the \$2 billion mark in August 1988 on its way to becoming the largest 401(k) type of retirement plan in the country.

With 1.4 million Federal employees participating, TSP is already the largest such plan in number of accounts.

USDA's role in the successful implementation of TSP has been enormous. In the words of Francis X. Cavanaugh, Executive Director of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, "Hiring the National Finance Center was the smartest decision we made." As part of the Office of Finance and Management, the National Finance Center designed, developed, and continues to operate the automated recordkeeping system for the TSP.

Major new development work was also completed for the TSP system during the year. Procedures were implemented for handling forfeitures, withdrawals, loans, F and C Fund data, and many other features of the plan.

#### **Cost Reductions Through the Use of Postage Meters**

In order to have direct accountability for mail, the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) cotton classing program installed postage meters in all division field offices. Previously, postage charges had been based on periodic mail surveys and estimates. AMS did not believe that the charges were equitable, and was certain that it was being overcharged for postage. This turned out to be true and AMS was successful in obtaining rebates from the Postal Service for previous bills. By using postage meters, AMS now has direct accountability for mail costs.

#### **Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act**

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) continues its strong financial management system review process in support of the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act of 1982. Through Fiscal Year (FY) 1988, 9 of the agency's 13 accounting systems have undergone detailed evaluations and the remaining system reviews are scheduled for completion in FY 1989. These reviews have confirmed the basic integrity of the financial management systems and provided reasonable assurance that the systems generally comply with Office of

Management and Budget (OMB) objectives and the accounting principles and standards established by the Comptroller General. The basic integrity of FmHA systems has been confirmed by external reviews, an AAA rating for assets, and FmHA being the first Government Agency to successfully sell loan assets to the private sector.

In addition to confirming the basic integrity of the financial management systems, these reviews have also identified areas where system improvements are warranted. These improvements are the cornerstone of FmHA's strategic financial system improvement plan, which will enhance the current automated accounting, financial, and management information system, to meet Comptroller General and OMB objectives by 1991.

#### **Credit Cards**

In Fiscal Year (FY) 1988, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) became the first USDA Agency to implement a credit card collection system for payments from the public. In April, the Aerial Photography Field Office, located in Salt Lake City, Utah, began accepting Mastercard and VISA for payments of goods and services, primarily, the sale of aerial photographs to producers and other individuals. In the first month of processing credit card collections, over \$6,000 of sales were recorded.

The use of credit cards provides the public with an additional payment option—one that many users find convenient. Furthermore, it provides a benefit to the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) by expediting the deposit of cash to CCC's account, compared to the time it takes for payments made by check to clear before being credited.

#### **Miscellaneous Payment System**

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) automated their manual miscellaneous obligation and payment system, which includes the electronic transmission of accrued obligations and payments to the National Finance Center (NFC).



The system permits the establishment of database files to store data for obligations, as incurred, and generates payment transactions upon receipt and approval of services and supplies. The system eliminates the redundancy in coding and typing of data during the various stages of the obligation, receipt and payment processes, speeds up the payment to vendors by eliminating manual preparation of hard copy vouchers, and mailing time and keytaping at the NFC. The database files also provide for ad hoc reporting of disbursements, obligations and unliquidated balances to the various FSIS Headquarters and program offices to better monitor their status of funds.

#### **Concentration Banking, Reconciliation, and Monitoring System**

The Concentration Banking, Reconciliation and Monitoring System (CBRAMS) is a computer-based management system for monitoring and reporting concentration banking activities for over 2,000 field offices of the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA). The principal objective of CBRAMS is to monitor the funds flow to ensure that all funds collected are deposited in FmHA's account at the New York Federal Reserve Bank, and that all accounting information pertaining to borrower's accounts is received at the Finance Office.

After full implementation of CBRAMS, the volume of transactions soon exceeded the capacity of the initial system requiring a run time of 40 to 50 hours to reconcile each day's activity. The resolution of this problem was the successful conversion of the CBRAMS to the IBM mainframe resulting in the following benefits:

- Reconciliation of activity is now performed daily. Daily reconciliation time has been reduced from over 40 hours to approximately 1 hour.
- System backup procedures have been simplified so accounting technicians have more time to reconcile the accounting data and resolve problems with local field offices.

- CBRAMS processing has been maintained at a current level since conversion. This results in information being available for the timely identification and resolution of problems that may be encountered.

- Because of the improved efficiency of the mainframe operation, Fiscal Year 1988 staffing levels were reduced by 4,174 full-time equivalency hours, resulting in an annual savings of about \$51,567.

#### **Enhanced Cash Management Controls**

Although concentration banking and improved disbursement systems have been significant cash management initiatives, some Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) field offices have not used the systems effectively. During Fiscal Year 1988, FmHA strengthened internal controls to preclude deposit and disbursement delays through new cash management reports to monitor field office performance. As a result of these accomplishments, FmHA's percentage of checks closed within 30 calendar days increased from 92 percent to 96 percent. This increase saved approximately \$500,000 in interest expense.

#### **General Cash Management**

In Fiscal Year (FY) 1988, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) continued to expand its use of a concentration banking system, which now allows for funds to be deposited at over 950 locations throughout the country, and concentrated overnight into one central bank. The "concentrator bank" wire-transfers these funds into the Commodity Credit Corporation's (CCC) account at Treasury. The total cash flow through this system in FY 1988 was approximately \$3.8 billion, resulting in direct interest savings to the Corporation of almost \$4 million. Since its inception in January 1986, this system has saved the Government over \$7 million.

By encouraging wire-transfer payments to the CCC, ASCS has

significantly improved the efficiency of its collection efforts. On approximately \$1 billion in loan repayments that were wire-transferred to CCC's account in FY 1988, savings amounted to over \$1.1 million.

#### **Departmentwide Financial Information System (DFIS)**

During Fiscal Year 1988, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) became the first program Agency to electronically interface its general ledger with the DFIS maintained by the National Finance Center (NFC). This effort, in addition to supporting the USDA initiative to establish a Departmentwide financial reporting system, focused on FmHA adoption of the U.S. Standard General Ledger and production of the revised U.S. Treasury Statements. The project included developing an extensive table driven automated crosswalk between FmHA's general ledger, DFIS, and U.S. Standard General Ledgers, to afford maximum flexibility in reacting to changing financial reporting requirements.

As a result of this effort, NFC was successful in generating the primary financial statements from DFIS, including Standard Form (SF) 220, Report on Financial Position; SF 221, Report on Operations; SF 222, Report on Cash Flow; and SF 223, Report on Reconciliation. More recently, coordination with NFC has been completed which will allow production of the SF 133, Report on Budget Execution, and the SF 225, Report on Obligations, for the FmHA program funds.

#### **Internal Controls**

During Fiscal Year 1988, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service/Commodity Credit Corporation (ASCS/CCC) placed significant emphasis on improving internal controls. Some of the major achievements included:

- automating a monitoring system to track the Agency's major concerns and problems and to identify corrective actions to resolve them;



- reviewing the Department/Agency audit response system and providing recommendations to management for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the current system;
- initiating the contracting out to private industry of detailed accounting system reviews required by the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act;
- performing in-house limited accounting system reviews of all ASCS/CCC accounting systems and subsystems to identify weaknesses and proposed corrective actions;
- merging the internal control and accounting system yearend reports to the Secretary into a single submission, which eliminated duplication and reduced workload; and
- developing improved communications and reporting among Washington, State, and County Offices regarding the importance of implementing and monitoring internal controls in all Agency operations.

#### **Loan Asset Sales**

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) continued its loan asset sales in Fiscal Year (FY) 1988, raising net proceeds of \$1,070,000,000 by allowing borrowers to purchase their loans at a discount.

FmHA has realized several key improvements in the credit management of its programs as a result of the loan asset sales, e.g., securitized sales and discount purchase programs. Specifically, FmHA loan asset sales exceeded the net proceeds target set by Congress for FYs' 1987 and 1988, thereby increasing revenue to the Government in the year of the sale. Asset sales eliminated the administrative burden, as well as the risk to the Government from defaults or foreclosures, by transferring servicing to the private sector or by selling the loans back to the borrowers.

Experience with asset sales has helped FmHA identify areas of improvement in loan documentation, which will improve the way FmHA manages the remaining loans in its portfolio. Additionally, these sales have provided information to help FmHA estimate the subsidy associated with its credit programs.

#### **Offset Program**

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) aggressively participated in both the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Salary Offset Programs in Fiscal Year 1988. Under the Salary Offset Program, field staff screened 3,145 borrowers identified in a match of delinquent FmHA borrowers and Department of Defense (DOD) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) employment files. This match prompted the initiation of salary offsets against a number of borrowers and, to date, approximately \$20,000 has been collected. Subsequently, a match was performed with the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and a second match with DOD and OPM employment files. Several USPS employees have been referred for salary offset, and the results of the second DOD/OPM match are in the process of being reviewed.

FmHA has participated successfully in the IRS Offset Program for several years. In 1988, approximately 2,100 borrowers were referred for offset, and the Agency netted \$1.1 million in collections.

#### **Information Resources Management**

##### **Residue Violation Information System (RVIS)**

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) developed a nationwide, interagency computer information system to handle information concerning residue violations in domestically slaughtered livestock and poultry. The system is currently being used by field and headquarters personnel of FSIS and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to rapidly track and exchange regulatory information on residue violation cases such as names of violators, the compound in violation, FDA-scheduled onsite reviews, pending

court cases, and other regulatory information.

Currently, the system contains in excess of 6,000 residue violation cases, utilizing information from over 15,000 laboratory forms. The RVIS proved to be a valuable information tool to both Agencies during the recent intensified Sulfamethazine testing program. The RVIS is a FSIS/FDA first at sharing a real time interactive nationwide data base that dramatically speeds up the exchange of information between Agencies. The RVIS can be made available for use by other Federal Agencies and States in the future.

##### **Field Office Automation**

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) continues to support field office automation objectives through the movement of program accounting and management information related functions to the field offices. Currently, FmHA field offices have the capability of data entry and discrepancy correction for approximately 40 loan making and servicing transactions; online borrower status inquiry; and online current/past bad debts inquiry.

Online borrower history inquiry capability was provided to FmHA field offices in Fiscal Year 1988. This feature allows field offices to view 15 months of borrower history and eliminates the need for the generation and mailing of various reports and over 6,500,000 forms. With the additional capability of online borrower history inquiry, FmHA field offices have the ability to maintain current and accurate loan data and be responsive to their clientele. It will also result in the expansion of field office transaction processing capabilities (i.e., transaction reversal and reapplications).

The elimination of reports and forms could result in an estimated annual savings of \$700,000.

##### **Consolidated Assignments, Personnel Tracking, and Administrative Information Network System (CAPTAIN)**

CAPTAIN is a nationwide, automated system which collects,

tracks, interfaces and reports audit and investigative data throughout the process and collects administrative data. The CAPTAIN System recently became operational in the Office of Inspector General (OIG), providing managers with a common information source and the analytical tools to effectively view and manage OIG operations, and to produce summary and detailed reports used for daily management, and for the Congressionally-mandated Semiannual Report to Congress.

Throughout the comprehensive integrated data bases, data entry screens, with edit checks and validations, enhance the user-friendly system. It can be accessed at various levels by many OIG employees and used to meet numerous management and operational information needs.

#### **Processing Power for the Future**

The award of a 6-year contract to IBM in July for replacement of the Office of Finance and Management's National Finance Center's (NFC) main-frame computers will assure adequate processing power for future administrative needs. Contract implementation began in August with the installation of a model 3090/400B, which replaced the NFC's older IBM 3081D.

Competition for USDA's business was fierce. As a result, the Department obtained a state-of-the-art, high-performance machine at a very attractive price. The contract with IBM will permit NFC to obtain, without the need for further formal procurements, replacements for two other existing mainframes as well as upgrades for new equipment. In addition, the contract provides for the acquisition of technologically superior equipment and software that IBM may develop in the future.

The new 3090 contains faster unit processors that have improved interactive response time and shortened batch processing cycles. The machine's larger memory has improved throughput, and its increased number of channels has reduced delays caused by contention for input and output. All this adds up to

better service for users of USDA's administrative systems.

#### **Monumental Office Automation Project**

In Fiscal Year 1988, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), completed one of the largest computer automation projects in the country. Computer systems were installed in 2,300 State, District, and County Offices, as well as the National Office and the Finance Office in St. Louis, Missouri. The systems now include over 2,200 mini-computers and 7,400 individual work station terminals.

Although the systems will perform a multitude of sophisticated functions, one of the most important is the ability to assist family farmers with their financial analyses. The County Supervisors now utilize computers on a daily basis to process loan applications faster and more efficiently. County Offices can electronically access, update, and correct databases involving borrower accounts, obtaining funds for borrowers, determining borrower status, and determining payoff figures using their local computer systems. The system also allows electronic mail communications among National, State, and District Offices across the country.

#### **GIS Monitors Ground Water**

Conservationists and landowners in Central Wisconsin, with assistance from the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and others, are able now to use a GIS to look at their ground water. GIS is short for a Geographic Information System.

With a GIS, several layers of map data can be managed simultaneously, automating the cumbersome job of gathering and analyzing information for specific locations. An interagency group is developing a GIS for evaluating ground water quality and supply in ten Wisconsin counties. The goal is to see ground water as it relates to other natural resources and different land uses.

The areas's sandy, porous soils are used in growing about 200,000 acres of irrigated potatoes, beans, and other vegetables. The ground water is

close to the soil surface (1 foot to 30 feet), and contamination could be a problem.

To deal with this, the Golden Sands Resource Conservation and Development Council hosted an interagency meeting in 1984 for officials from Portage County, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Wisconsin Geological and Natural Survey, the Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center, the University of Wisconsin, and the SCS. Those attending agreed that information needed to be consolidated and evaluated before making any decisions regarding ground water and decided to do it with a GIS. Together, they formed the Central Sands Geographic Information Program and selected Portage County as the pilot. Most farmers support the program because they see the need for accurate data.

By July 1987, the agencies had gathered data for six layers in the GIS: soils, land use/cover, regulated contaminant sources, well inventory, hydrologic maps, and the base map layer.

The soils layer consists of SCS soils data from the Portage County soil survey. The County Planning Department provided data for the land use/cover layer. This layer identifies agricultural land, irrigated agricultural land, woodland, grassland, residential land, undeveloped tracks, built-up incorporated land industrial sites, commercial sites, extraction pits, publicly-owned land, single residences, churches, and cemeteries.

The regulated contaminated source layer provides information on animal waste storage sites, auto salvage yards, commercial fertilizer and pesticide warehouses, landfills, municipal land disposal, sludge spreading, accidental spills, salt storage, and industrial waste disposal sites. This information came from the County and the Wisconsin DNR.

The well inventory combines well construction records, with water quality testing data from the County, the university, and the Wisconsin DNR.



The hydrologic map layer provides data on aquifer potential, bedrock geology, and ground water flow.

The base map layer combines public land survey, surface water, transportation, wetlands, and topography maps. An additional layer on underground storage tanks is being considered.

When the GIS is fully operational, it will be able to provide ample information in a matter of minutes for making wise decisions in the use of the County's resources.

#### **Raisin Advisory Committee Project**

Early in Fiscal Year 1988, the Processed Products Branch (FVD-PPB) of the Agricultural Marketing Service's Fruit and Vegetable Division, located in Fresno, California, requested that the Information Resources Management Division (IRMD) perform a systems analysis and feasibility study to automate and electronically transmit raisin data. IRMD completed the analysis, made a design and equipment recommendation, assisted with the technical aspects of procurement, and provided extensive programming and system development. The resulting system incorporates multi-user capabilities and relational database technology, which goes beyond the capabilities of most ordinary microcomputer applications.

The application required assessment and integration of the requirements of the Raisin Advisory Committee's (RAC) system. To date, this application has resulted in successful transmission of USDA raisin data from plant locations to FVD-PPB in Fresno to the RAC. It is one of the more sophisticated uses of UNIX-based technology in AMS.

#### **ADP Capabilities for Investigations**

Under the Office of Inspector General (OIG) automation efforts, OIG achieved the potential to advance the frontiers of investigative ADP applications in the OIG community. Sufficient ADP equipment was purchased to provide one laptop computer for every two Special Agents in the Agency. In addition, an intensive

5-day course of instruction was provided for all Agents, covering the basic knowledge and skills necessary to properly apply this technology in the course of their investigations.

Also, Investigations has established, within its ranks, computer expertise that is proving to be the source of significant cost savings in terms of technical support to operations (search warrant executions, grand jury subpoena, etc.) involving ADP records and creating customized software programs in support of investigative operations.

#### **Telecommunications Service Office**

The Office of Information Resources Management completed the automation of the USDA Telecommunications Service Office (TSO). This project involved the installation of three electronic ordering systems, a Telecommunications Service System (TSS), and a USDA Directory Locator System (DLS). The electronic ordering systems provide direct order input to AT&T and C&P, the telephone companies serving USDA in the Washington, D.C. area.

The TSS provides order tracking, equipment inventory, trouble report logs, Agency telephone costs, vendor costs, and a Directory Locator call volume. The System is used to generate a wide variety of statistical reports on USDA's telephone system.

The DLS contains a complete A to Z personnel listing as well as an organizational listing. This System is used by the Directory Locator service (447-USDA) to provide callers with information on USDA personnel and USDA contractors. DLS is also used by security personnel in both the Administration and South Buildings. The USDA Telephone Directory is printed from the DLS database.

The TSO serves the USDA Washington metro area telephone system, which is comprised of approximately 18,000 lines at 21 locations in the District, Maryland, and Virginia. Each year the TSO processes approximately 3,000 service orders, 4,000 trouble calls, and 50,000 locator calls. Automating the TSO has

significantly increased the speed and efficiency of these operations, greatly improving telephone service to the Agencies.

#### **USDA Celebrated an Anniversary**

The year 1988 marked the 25th anniversary of administrative automation and consolidation in USDA. It was in 1963 that the first centralized, integrated Payroll/Personnel System was implemented by the newly formed Management Data Service Center, a forerunner of the National Finance Center (NFC), in New Orleans. Centralization of administrative payments and accounting followed the success of this effort.

USDA's systems have evolved with developing ADP and telecommunications technology. The early systems, like the early technology, seem primitive by today's standards. Then, all documents were mailed to the NFC to be keypunched. Errors had to be corrected manually. A limited number of management reports were available and were mailed to Agencies. Inquiries were by telephone or mail.

In contrast, users today have direct electronic access to many systems from any number of remote sites. They may enter information, correct information, make inquiries, and produce a wide variety of reports at any time. Basic services have been replaced by numerous subsystems.

You've come a long way, baby!

#### **Paperwork Reduction**

The Farmers Home Administration's (FmHA) automated data processing environment provides for the data entry of selected loan and grant accounting transactions at FmHA field office remote terminal site locations. FmHA field offices prepare the accounting source/input documents and enter the accounting transactions through a terminal.

During Fiscal Year 1988, FmHA implemented several paperwork reduction initiatives related to FmHA field office transaction processing. Procedures were developed to eliminate the requirement for FmHA

field offices to maintain separate operational files for copies of source/input documents, since the originals were maintained in borrower case files. Procedures were also developed to discontinue the mailing of source/input documents to the Finance Office for transactions, which were entered at FmHA field office terminal sites and routed to the FmHA Finance Office for processing.

These procedural changes resulted in eliminating unnecessary file maintenance and document submission by FmHA field offices. Annual cost savings are estimated to be over \$1.2 million.

### Modernizing Program Delivery

USDA field office employees from 36 States and Puerto Rico, along with Headquarters representatives from Washington, D.C., participated in a workshop held in Kansas City on May 17-20, 1988, under the leadership of the Office of Information Resources Management. "Modernizing Program Delivery" was the theme, with the main thrust on the use of information and information technology to more effectively deliver USDA's program services to its clients.

Over 500 employees attended the opening general session to hear Deputy Secretary Peter Myers give the keynote address and lend his support to the effort. A highlight of the workshop was the exhibition room with demonstrations of typical field offices of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, the Farmers Home Administration, the Forest Service and the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), showing how technology is used today to assist in carrying out the daily functions of those Agencies in the field. Other demonstrations included the Extension Service Public Service Kiosk, DEPNET, the National Computer Center, and the USDA EDI System.

Workshop attendees heard administrators from five USDA Agencies discuss how far their organizations have come in the use of information and information technology and where they would like to see them go in the next few years.



Visiting the SCS Demonstration Booth: From right to left Deputy Secretary Myers; Wilson Scaling, Administrator, SCS; and Jeff Hart, District Conservationist, Osage City, Kansas.

Additional speakers provided insight from the viewpoint of the private sector, State governments, the Office of Management and Budget, and Agency management in the field.

### Automation Review and Improvement

To improve the efficiency of automation efforts and streamline ADP processes, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) appointed, in early Fiscal Year 1988, five work groups and an Automation Review and Improvement Steering Committee. The work groups were formed to effect improvements and fine tune operations in: Application Development Methodology, Training, Directives and Communications, Production Adjustment Automation Activities, and Price Support Automation Activities. The Steering Committee provided each work group with scopes of assignments and timeframes and held individual meetings with each work group. Once work group efforts were complete, the Steering Committee reviewed in detail all recommendations, proposed acceptance or rejection, and arranged for approval by the Agency Administrator.

The approved work group recommendations (more than 100) will either become part of the Agency's

Information Resources Management initiatives (major milestones) for further study, or be implemented by the responsible organizational units. This effort has enabled ASCS automation activities to become more exemplary of effective automation software development and use.

### Contingency and Disaster Recovery Plan

The National Computer Center at Kansas City (NCC-KC), Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), and other users of the NCC-KC jointly identified major milestones and requirements for the development of a Contingency and Disaster Recovery Plan for the NCC-KC. The objectives were to outline the advance plans and arrangements necessary to ensure continuity of the essential functions performed by the NCC-KC.

The Plan consists of identifying critical job processes, required vendor software for offsite contingency, user production libraries, user production data sets, and data communication requirements. Also included in the Plan are emergency response procedures and checklists, emergency chain of command, various recovery teams, backup operations, and recovery actions from short-term delays to major disasters.

As a major user of the NCC-KC, FmHA has developed a similar Contingency and Disaster Recovery Plan for its Finance Office in St. Louis. The complementary Plans are designed to provide organization and guidance in the event of an emergency at either the NCC-KC or the FmHA Finance Office.

FmHA provides updates to its Plan as new requirements, subsystems, or priorities are identified. The major benefit is that the FmHA Finance Office will be able to implement recovery measures in the event of a major emergency or disaster and continue to provide service to its nationwide users.

### Hotline Automation

During Fiscal year 1988, a new automated management information system was implemented for the



Office of Inspector General's (OIG) Hotline. The new system assists OIG in more fully automating its Hotline operations. Most importantly, the system allows OIG to more accurately track the resolution of Hotline complaints and analyze the complaints for trends that indicate which USDA programs may be more susceptible to fraud, waste, and abuse. The new information system also makes it possible for OIG to gather all the data which will be requested in the future by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

The Hotline staff worked closely with OIG's Information Management Systems staff to convert the automated Hotline records from the old system, as well as to streamline procedures for entering and tracking all new Hotline complaints. Each Complaints Analysis Specialist on the Hotline staff now has immediate access to a terminal, which allows for more efficient data entry and querying of prior case records. The new automated system allows for the storage of significantly more information and faster retrieval of information than the prior system.

#### **New Database Capabilities**

The National Computer Center at Fort Collins has provided new database capabilities for several USDA Agencies. These database packages provide improved relational database management through 4th generation language features using the ANSI standard, Structured Query Language. Agencies benefiting from these new services are the Forest Service with its Timber Sale Program Information Reporting System and the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Residue Violation Information System.

Distributed systems and networking are becoming mainstays for satisfying the information needs of USDA Agencies. Significant tangible and intangible benefits have been gained through these new database capabilities, including support for the Department's compatibility goal and easier information sharing among Agencies and the public.

#### **Automated Budget System**

Prior to February 1988, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) spent several months assembling budget requests from its 46 State Offices, the Finance Office in St. Louis, Missouri, and the National Headquarters. This process required considerable coordination, manual assembly of data, preparation of work sheets, and analysts to produce the Administrative Budget requests, now totaling over \$500 million, needed to support 12,675 staff years and Agency programs of over \$7 billion.

The FmHA began its field automation efforts by installing Multi-functional Workstations in all FmHA offices across the Nation. The Budget Staff wanted to be one of the first fully-integrated computer systems to make use of this new technology.

The Automated Budget System (ABS) is an on-line menu-driven automated system composed of three subsystems: (1) The Expense Status Subsystem includes the electronic transmission by the State Offices of the field employment status, which is transmitted to the Agency's mainframe computer center in Kansas City; (2) The Budget Request Subsystem, known as the State Resource Management Plan (SRMP), enables States to input their complete budget request into a massive database at Kansas City, which consolidates all the requests, produces analyses work sheets, and finally provides an overall Agency Administrative Operating Plan and Budget covering two fiscal years; and (3) the File Maintenance Subsystem which provides for the overall maintenance of the total system.

FmHA held field training for its State Office Administrative Officers in February 1988 with hands-on instruction. When they returned to their offices, they immediately inputted their budgets. The SRMP worked quite well and the FmHA was able to complete its overall budget in about one-third the time it used to take before the automation efforts.

#### **Communication and Reporting Channels**

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has developed and fine-tuned a set of communication and reporting channels for Information Resources Management (IRM) issues that cut across traditional organizational lines.

This infrastructure is headed up by an IRM Council, chaired by the Associate Administrator. The Council, comprised of top level managers from APHIS programs, charts the course of the Agency's information systems, and makes decisions on policy matters.

A Technical Review Board, consisting of mid-level managers from APHIS' programs meets monthly to discuss operating issues, to coordinate long-range project activity, and to formulate recommendations on policy matters for the consideration of the IRM Council.

These operating channels provide a mechanism for speedy dissemination of IRM-related information to those who need it, and effective management and coordination of IRM projects.

#### **Task Force on Reports and Information Management**

A Task Force on Reports and Information Management (TRIM) was established by the Administrator to review all forms and reports generated within the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) at the National level. The purpose of this review was to eliminate duplicate reporting and all unnecessary forms and reports and to consolidate, where possible. An overriding consideration was to streamline the process, fully utilize automation capabilities, and incorporate statistical sampling.

TRIM recommended the elimination of 151 forms; 49 of these were eliminated in August 1988. The remaining forms were referred to the sponsoring organizations to make appropriate changes in FmHA procedures by the end of this calendar year.

Thirty-seven (37) percent of the report reduction recommendations have been implemented. Specific offices involved for the remaining 63 percent of reports have been contacted for action. TRIM recommended that State Offices conduct a similar review of their own reporting burden on their District and County Offices and establish a TRIM Task Force in each State to review the existing State reports and forms.

## **Real Property, Facilities and Procurement Management**

### **Excess Property Seminar**

In November 1987, the Cooperative Management Staff (CMS), Extension Service (ES), held its first Federal Excess Personal Property Seminar for State Extension and Research participants. The Seminar grew out of a need for instruction and a better understanding of the program by those who were already participating and those who were eligible, but not yet involved. Approximately 3 months were spent developing the agenda, lining up speakers, selecting a conference site, and preparing the necessary materials. Cooperative Extension at the University of Kentucky volunteered to host the Seminar at Lexington.

Early registration indicated that approximately 53 persons would be attending from 28 States. However, the final count was 71 State and Federal representatives from 31 States, the District of Columbia, and two Territories (Guam and Saipan). Among the colleges represented were the Tuskegee University, Alabama; University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff; Ft. Valley State College, Georgia; Kentucky State University; Southern University and A&M College, Louisiana; University of Maryland, Eastern Shore; Alcorn State, Mississippi; North Carolina A&T State University; South Carolina State College; Virginia State; and the University of the District of Columbia.

The agenda was quite comprehensive and covered not only topics requested in communications from the States, but also troublesome areas—those where new

developments had recently taken place, and general policy.

One of the highlights of the Seminar was a trip to the nearby Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office (DRMO) at the Blue Grass Army Depot in Lexington. (Transportation was provided by the University of Kentucky on two buses that they had acquired from Federal excess.) The property disposal officer at the DRMO guided the tour and encouraged the colleges to take as much property as they could carry; however, CMS tempered this by reinforcing the concept of only acquiring what is needed.

Throughout the Seminar, it was quite apparent that the participants were not only vitally interested in every facet of the program, but that they were enthusiastic, as evidenced by their questions and total involvement. In addition, there was a great deal of discussion and interaction with the primary speakers, as well as among the participants themselves.

At the conclusion of the Seminar, a True and False Quiz and an Evaluation Questionnaire were completed by participants. Most of the attendees indicated that they got all the True and False Questions correct, indicating that the Seminar objectives were realized.

The Evaluation Questionnaires were extremely complimentary and also included many constructive suggestions, including a recommendation that this Seminar be held at least every 2 years in order to build on what was learned at this first Seminar and to strengthen the rapport and networking among participants and CMS.

### **National Facilities Management Plan**

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has continued implementation of its National Facilities Management Plan for the repair, alteration, and maintenance of facilities where high priority research is being conducted. In Fiscal Year 1988, \$16 million in new architectural-engineering construction contract awards and contract administration of ongoing previous

fiscal year construction took place at eight locations.

In order to understand the magnitude of facility deficiencies at 55 of ARS' 130 locations, where priority research programs take place, the Agency pursued the formulation of an extensive 6-year long-term facilities planning document. This action necessitated: (1) application of appropriate modernization strategy for each location; e.g., total renovations versus utility system upgrade only; (2) in-house/contract assessment of needs; (3) identification of funding commitments; and (4) sequencing of project implementation in context of study, design, and construction over a multi-year period.

The ARS Modernization Plan depicts projected repair and maintenance needs totaling \$230 million for the first 55 locations, that are conducting priority research programs.

### **Inventory Management**

Traditionally, the Farmers Home Administration's (FmHA) Finance Office in St. Louis had inventory management responsibilities for FmHA personal property nationwide. All inventory transactions, excess/surplus determinations, small lot sales, etc., were handled on a centralized basis. Not only was this a tremendous administrative burden on the Finance Office, but the sheer volume of inventory transactions often led to backlogs which obviously affected the accuracy of the master file. Furthermore, from an internal control standpoint, the ultimate responsibility for the property did not reside with the individuals who actually had physical control over it.

Consequently, it was decided to streamline the inventory processes to the extent possible, and then to delegate the responsibilities to the FmHA State Offices. By raising accountability thresholds prudently, approximately 80 percent of the items previously in the Property Management Inventory System at the National Finance Center (NFC) were deleted. This reduction of accountable items not only simplified their overall



management, but radically reduced costs by decreasing the number of line items for which NFC assesses entry/maintenance fees.

Training materials and instructions were then developed for in-house training of State Office personnel on their new responsibilities. Training was conducted late in Fiscal Year (FY) 1988 so the delegations could become effective with the start of FY 1989. By streamlining the inventory process prior to making the delegations, State Offices will be able to discharge their responsibilities with no additional staffing. FmHA estimates annual savings of \$220,000.

### **USDA Food Services**

The new USDA Headquarters food service contractor, Canteen Corporation, began operations on May 31, 1988. Since the old food service contractor did not vacate the premises until close of business May 27, 1988, it took superhuman effort over the 72-hour Memorial Day weekend to get the South Building cafeteria remodeled and ready for business by 6:30 a.m. on Tuesday, May 31.

One-hundred (100) employees of the Office of Operation's Facilities Management Division (FMD), outside contractors, and the Canteen Corporation did indeed remodel the entire cafeteria over the weekend! The attractive results of these efforts are apparent.

Additional enhancements to the South Building cafeteria include: new carpet, new tables and chairs and new wall and window coverings. A new conveyor system and the installation of more self-service stations already promote more efficient and quicker food service. The welcomed changes are the result of a new concept in food service planning.

FMD convened a special advisory panel comprised of USDA employees representing over a dozen agencies. The input of this group—the advisory panel, FMD, and the Canteen Corporation, is directly responsible for the highly successful transition in USDA food service. Business has

increased over 50 percent since June 1988.

Another dramatic change within the South Building cafeteria is the incorporation of a 2,000 square foot meeting/seminar center. The center is located on the C Street end of the cafeteria and may be scheduled by contacting David Shea (447-2913) of FMD. The center, with three separate folding door meeting sections, reverts to cafeteria seating between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily, but is available during all other working hours.

The Canteen Corporation has also experienced rapid growth in the catered food area. They will set up a coffee service, cocktail party, or even a sit-down dinner for up to 300 USDA employees within the building complex.

### **Warehouse Consolidation**

Following the successes experienced by the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce in warehouse cross-servicing, the President's Council on Management Improvement (PCMI) adopted this initiative as one of its major projects for Fiscal Year 1988. Agriculture was asked to lead this effort. The project Steering Committee, Implementation Team, and working groups researched various aspects of warehousing, such as technological advancements and private sector warehousing practices. The research included:

- Site visits to Government and private sector activities to observe technological advancements in printing and storage of large volumes of forms and publications;
- Warehouse surveys of the participating Agencies, which included warehouse site visits, data review, and analysis;
- Extensive research into print-on-demand and state-of-the-art warehousing technology;
- Meetings with managers of the participating Agencies to assess their particular needs and

requirements regarding the shared warehousing concept;

- A 2-day project retreat to address the project's goals and an implementation strategy; and
- an Interim Report prepared for the PCMI Steering Committee.

An outgrowth of the retreat and other meetings was the development of a two-step strategy to accomplish the shared warehousing goal. In the near term a "HUB/Satellite" operation using existing space will be implemented, with the current USDA warehouse as the operational HUB and satellite facilities used for bulk storage. In the longer term, a single operating facility or complex will be utilized to achieve the greatest efficiencies and economies. The PCMI Shared Warehousing Services Project has identified new warehouse space to begin the initial phase of the consolidation process. In addition to space, a contractor was selected to operate the consolidated warehouse facilities. The National Industries for the Severely Handicapped will become the prime contractor as of January 1, 1989, with a 30-day transitional period beginning December 1, 1988.

Two Memorandums of Understanding were signed with customer Agencies. The National Endowment for the Arts will consolidate its forms and publications into the current USDA Landover, Maryland, facility and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Secretary will consolidate its inventory in the new warehouse space. A signing ceremony was held on September 21, 1988, signifying the importance of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Department of Health and Human Services joining the Consolidated Forms and Publications Distribution Center (CFPDC) as its first customers.

Negotiations continue with the Public Health Service and the Department of Treasury. These Agencies have indicated a high level of interest to participate in the consolidation.



Signing on the dotted line, Seated left to right: James Trickett, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management Services, Department of Health and Human Services; Peter J. Basso, Deputy Chairperson for Management, National Endowment for the Arts; Katherine M. Bulow, Assistant Secretary for Administration, Department of Commerce; and John J. Franke, Assistant Secretary for Administration, Department of Agriculture.

The consolidated warehouse operation offers on-line electronic ordering of agency forms and publications, automated inventory control and stock replenishment, worldwide distribution, and, in the future, plans to offer electronic document storage/print-on-demand services. The CFPDC is governed by a Board of Directors made up of representatives from the participating Departments/Agencies. Upon full consolidation in FY 1991, we anticipate approximately \$5 million in savings annually in current cost outlays and significantly improved productivity and efficiency.

Also, as a result of this study, the recommendation has been made that the Department of Health and Human Services' Health Care Finance Administration consolidate with the Social Security Administration. This should result in a substantially improved warehousing operation in the Baltimore area. In addition to this recommendation, this study resulted in the Department of Education (DOEd) relinquishing their warehouse totally. Because DOEd still needed a small amount of storage space, space was identified at the General Services Administration's (GSA) Personal

Property Center in Franconia, Virginia. GSA agreed to provide this storage space at no cost. This effort will result in a savings of over \$200,000 to DOEd.

#### Microfiche Duplication

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) Finance Office in St. Louis uses microfiche extensively to service the accounts of borrowers nationwide. Thus, the ongoing work of hundreds of employees depends heavily on the availability of current, high quality microfiche.

Historically, the original microfiche masters were created by a contractor from FmHA-provided computer tapes. The masters were then copied in-house by FmHA employees on three microfiche duplicators and then distributed throughout the office, generally by mid-morning. While this system was satisfactory, there were occasional problems with timely delivery of the microfiche to the users. Furthermore, the implementation of flexible work hours meant many employees began starting their workday as early as 6:30 a.m., making earlier receipt of microfiche an even greater priority.

Establishing an earlier shift of in-house personnel to duplicate the microfiche would have been costly

and would have created other staffing problems. The solution was found in contracting out the creation and duplication of the microfiche. The contractor was required to comply with turnaround times which would ensure that microfiche was available to employees at the start of their tours of duty. An additional benefit was improved quality, since the contractor had state-of-the-art equipment.

By eliminating the in-house duplicator equipment and their related maintenance, supplies, and staffing support, contracting out was cost-effective as well as efficient.

#### Consolidated ADP Support Contract

Over the past 5 years, ADP support for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has been provided through two separate service contracts. To reduce costs and to streamline contract management, ARS made a decision to consolidate these requirements into one contract. In February 1988, a consolidated ADP support services contract was awarded for 4.5 years (including options), at an estimated annual value of \$2 million. This contract provides a full range of ADP support services, including program management and technical support in areas of systems analysis, programming, personal computers, Datapoint, Wang, Plexus, Prime database management, artificial intelligence, security, technical writing, computer graphics, etc. Approximately 50 full-time equivalents are employed on this contract.

The overall benefits of the ADP contract consolidation include central contract management; better utilization of resources; lower administrative costs; timely dissemination of information to both the program and administrative areas of ARS; close technical coordination in the integration of hardware, software, data communication, desk top publishing, management information systems, use of the Departmental computer center, and assistance in long-range ADP planning.



### Telephone Equipment

Because the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) has approximately 2,300 offices nationwide, costs for telephone equipment and services are a major concern. Prior to divestiture, leasing telephone equipment from the local servicing telephone company was the only truly viable option. However, given the current marketplace and the availability of General Services Administration (GSA) Purchase of Telephones and Services contracts, opportunities exist to reduce communication costs.

At the beginning of Fiscal Year 1988, FmHA's telephone equipment inventory consisted primarily of leased systems. Furthermore, many of these systems were still rotary dial. A determination was made to address both of these issues through the purchase of installed leased equipment and/or the replacement of rotary systems with purchased touchtone equipment.

The economies obtained through competitive procurements and the use of GSA schedule offerings will enable FmHA to amortize the cost of this massive upgrade in less than 1 year by eliminating lease costs. The subsequent annual savings to FmHA are estimated at \$1 million.

### Real Property Automation

The Foundation Information for Real Property Management (FIRM) System has proven to be a good tool in helping managers control their real property assets. Since last fall, the System has been made available for Governmentwide use and is in various stages of implementation by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Interior, Justice, Labor, Treasury, the General Services Administration (GSA), and the Veterans Administration.

Our involvement in the systems development and design is not over. USDA chairs the User Group which is responsible for advising GSA what enhancements should be made to the System and what new applications

should be included in Phase 2. Within the Department, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has installed the System in their Minneapolis office and Agricultural Research Service has installed the System in their General Services Division in Hyattsville.

### Leasing/Small Purchases

In Fiscal Year (FY) 1988, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) continued its program of offering delegated leasing and small purchase authority to those State Offices willing to commit the resources and obtain the necessary training. These functions were previously handled exclusively by the FmHA Finance Office in St. Louis.

To date, 36 State Offices have been delegated authority to lease real property. In FY 1988, leasing procedures were streamlined and training was given on the "fast track" method of leasing which, through onsite visits and face-to-face negotiations with offerors, enables space to be acquired relatively quickly. Warranted leasing officers also receive periodic refresher training on any regulatory or policy changes. Similarly, 33 State Offices received delegated small purchases authority and were given periodic refresher training.

Periodic reviews of leasing and small purchases actions are made by the Finance Office and the National Office to ensure that the delegations are being properly exercised. These delegations have enabled the State Offices to better meet their requirements in a timely manner and have given them full control over expenditures made against their allocations.

### Office Relocations

Everyone hates office relocations! They rank near the top of everyone's stress-causing list and forced relocation just makes the situation worse.

The Holocaust Commission's 1987 acquisition of the West Auditor's Building led to a forced 1988 relocation for approximately 175 Cooperative State Research Service

(CSRS) and 20 Extension Service (ES) employees. The Office of Operation's (OO) Facilities Management Division directed the 15-month relocation project from the West Auditor's Building to 370 L'Enfant Plaza.

The efficiency of OO and Agency planners is analogous to a good baseball umpire, who draws little attention when performing well. The following partial list of the events/actions associated with the West Auditor's relocation illustrates the often unrecognized complexity of office moves:

- worked with GSA to locate more space and coordinate the move from West Auditors;
- coordinated CSRS/ES special needs;
- arranged new lease with lessor;
- developed space layout (e.g. work areas, telephone copiers, ADP equipment/droplines, restrooms, water fountains, fire protection equipment, heating and air conditioning, lighting, plumbing, etc.);
- arranged for new door signs, directory boards, blinds, carpet storage space, trash bins, vending machines, new keys, and, yes—bike racks;
- provided engineering certification of floors' capability of carrying structural loads for heavy files and equipment;
- arranged for new parking;
- identified items to be moved to specific locations;
- set up security to cover both locations during move;
- selected movers;
- when required, remodeled space - including framing, drywall, paint, carpet, door signs, kitchen equipment, shelving, etc.; and
- finally, moved 200,000 pounds of furniture, records and material.

### **Tyvec Envelopes**

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) procures large (approximately 11"x13") envelopes in volume for use throughout the Agency for mailings of case folders, bulk forms, etc. FmHA had previously determined that a Tyvec-type envelope was not only desirable because of its strength, but was also cost-effective because it could be reused numerous times.

Historically, because of their somewhat unique specifications, these envelopes were procured via Agency contract. Recently, FmHA identified a stock envelope meeting virtually the same specifications available from the General Services Administration (GSA) at a significantly lower price. By switching to the standard GSA envelope, FmHA estimates annual savings of \$30,000 will be realized.

### **Personnel Management**

#### **Demonstration Project**

USDA has received approval from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to proceed with the development of a demonstration project to evaluate an alternative approach to recruitment, selection, and employee retention, with potential Governmentwide application. The goal of the project is to develop a recruitment and selection program, which is flexible and responsive to local recruitment needs, and which will facilitate the attainment of a quality workforce reflective of society. The project has three objectives:

1. to develop a more efficient recruitment and hiring system;
2. to emphasize extended evaluation of on-the-job performance as a necessary criterion for granting career tenure; and
3. to increase the attractiveness of Federal employment through the payment of recruitment and retention bonuses, as well as reimbursement for travel and relocation expenses, beyond current authorizations.

The project will be implemented at selected Agricultural Research Service and Forest Service sites. The coverage is limited to new employees and will continue until total numbers approach the coverage limitation of 5,000 employees. Project implementation is tentatively scheduled for October 1989, subject to *Federal Register* publication, notification of affected employees, veterans groups, Congress, and labor unions. OPM must approve the final project plan.

#### **Development Program for Women**

In Fiscal Year 1988, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) initiated a pilot program at the National Office entitled "Development Program for Women." This Program was tailored specifically around the needs of women in the FmHA. It consisted of six 1-day workshops designed to inform and teach women about key issues and strategies needed to advance in their careers. These issues included career development, managing and coping with change, positive power and influence, enhancing personal effectiveness, team development, and action planning.

Feedback from the pilot was very positive and the participants felt that they had learned about issues vital to advancement in their careers and that they had established a support and network system to continue their career planning! Due to the success of the program and the overwhelming number of women wanting to take the course, several programs for FY 1989 are already scheduled.

#### **Initiatives With 1890 Institutions**

The Department of Agriculture and the 1890 Institutions held a benchmark Symposium during April in Nashville, Tennessee. As a result, the Chief of the Forest Service was selected to chair a ten-member task force, which is spearheading and supporting many of the activities evolving out of this major USDA initiative with the 1890 Institutions. Chief Dale Robertson is fully committed toward cementing closer relations with the 1890 Institutions and towards meeting the objectives of the Symposium.

As work toward building partnership and bridging gaps between USDA and the 1890 Institutions continues, the Forest Service and the Department will strive to:

- establish better lines of communication with 1890 Institutions and facilitate a reciprocal exchange of USDA and 1890 personnel;
- expand and improve special employment programs which can lead to recruitment of minority students;
- have representatives of 1890 Institutions on relevant boards, councils, and commissions of Agriculture; and
- establish partnership in research facilities, staff information, and other areas, which can result in advanced agricultural research.

#### **Management Realignment**

In January 1988, the Agricultural Research Service initiated a realignment of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center's organizational structure. The realignment strengthened the management team's capacity to direct the research programs to the Nation's highest priority agricultural problems.

The total realignment package included administrative, farm, and facilities support. These support functions were enhanced to improve delivery of support services and, thus, relieve Research Leaders of paperwork, provide more effective and timely support, and improve program and financial accountability. The new structure provides for improved management and staffing to bring modern techniques and systems to support the facility modernization and maintenance, land use, environment, safety, security, and farm operations programs.

A novel approach was implemented for improving administrative support services by establishing four administrative

centers, providing accounts maintenance, procurement, property, and personnel action processing. The service centers are located in facilities throughout the 7,000-acre Beltsville research complex in close proximity to the research staff, for which they provide administrative services.

### **Better Working Relations**

The Soil Conservation Service's (SCS) Resources Inventory Division has responsibility for material resource data needed to support SCS and USDA programs. This includes collecting, interpreting and reporting soil, water and related resources data nationwide, and operating a network of snowfall data collection sites in the West.

During Fiscal Year 1988, the Division developed an action plan for better working relations. The Division established objectives and goals, including action items with specific staff assignments, to improve working relations. This will improve internal staff operations, as well as interactions with others, both within and outside SCS.

Major objectives include improving the transfer of resource data technology and making the work within the Division more enjoyable. Goals include increasing networking; improving training; providing high quality staff support, equipment and space; improving planning strategies; encouraging a free flow of communications; developing a team approach to job performance, and increasing staff social functions.

### **Training and Commitment: The Keys to Success**

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) acquired, beginning in Fiscal Year 1988, the most modern microcomputer hardware and software available to increase staff effectiveness to a degree thought impossible just a few years ago. However powerful, the FNS Computer Hardware and Modernization Program (CHAMP) provides potential only, for without training and commitment—the keys to success—the technology would be useless.

The first key, the CHAMP Training Project, ushered FNS into a new era, enabling the Agency to close the gap between the earlier 8/16-bit technology and the new networked 32-bit microcomputers and file servers. The Project trained staff to become proficient in the new Agency-standard word processing software (Word Perfect), while making instruction available on the latest versions of established spreadsheet and database softwares. Although arrangements for a substantial number of training classes were made for the introduction of the new technology, not everyone who wanted training had the immediate opportunity. To fill this void, programmed instruction packages were made available throughout the Agency. Ongoing, in-house training was provided on all Agency-supported software, at introductory, advanced, and reinforcement levels through the Headquarters Information Center. Similar training classes were held in all Regions.

The second key, commitment (and the ultimate responsibility), lay with the individual. Every employee is responsible for taking advantage of the training available and putting that training to use with a commitment to enter the new era. This technology, so awesome in power, was developed so recently and so suddenly that, in practical terms, an experienced ADP person is now defined as someone with 6 months exposure to the present technology. Thus, the position of a FNS employee is approximately equal to anyone in the micro automation world, no matter what his/her background had been until now.

### **National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

October 1988, National Disability Employment Awareness (NDEA) Month, was a Presidentially proclaimed month to increase awareness of the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. This allowed employees of USDA to join together to renew their dedication and commitment to meeting the goal of full opportunities for disabled citizens. The theme for NDEA Month, "Employment A Two-Way Opportunity," focused on the interface between the National

goal of employment of persons with a disability, and effective utilization in the advantages accruing to public and private sector employers and their employees. This was the first year for a joint NDEA Month activity. USDA participated, along with the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). A few of the highlights included:

- an Opening ceremony, hosted by USDA, featured Dr. Irving King Jordan, President, Gallaudet University;
- an Attitudinal Training Program for Supervisors and Managers, hosted by NASA, featured Mr. Richard Pimentel, Milt Wright and Associates;
- an awards ceremony program recognized 21 of USDA's outstanding disabled employees and their supervisors; and
- a "Job Fair," hosted by the Department of Labor, provided managers an opportunity to conduct onsite interviews and make a job offer on-the-spot.

This joint NDEA Month activity was a very rewarding and successful endeavor that not only allowed USDA to increase employment opportunities for the disabled, but provided a means to achieve these initiatives in cooperation with other Federal Agencies.

### **Civil Rights Council Comes Into Its Own in 1988**

The Civil Rights Council was initiated by John Franke, Assistant Secretary for Administration, in 1987. Composed of the Civil Rights Directors of each USDA Agency, the Council advises the Secretary on civil rights policy, makes recommendations on civil rights-related issues, serves as a clearinghouse for information, and serves as a point of coordination for civil rights programs in USDA.

The Council holds monthly meetings. In 1988, it also held workshops in Baltimore and at the



University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, for purposes of teambuilding and setting objectives. The latter meeting included joint sessions with personnel directors of USDA agencies in recognition of the interrelated nature of civil rights and personnel functions in achieving an effective civil rights program in USDA.

As a result of its work in 1988, the Civil Rights Council was able to:

- improve the image of civil rights as a professional function and integral aspect of Agency management;
- facilitate progress in meeting the Secretary's civil rights policy objectives;
- influence Department positions on civil rights structure and equal employment opportunity counseling through meetings and position papers; and
- increase cooperation among Agencies in providing civil rights training at the State and local level.

#### **Employee Assistance Program**

Fiscal Year (FY) 1988 marked a period of significant expansion of the Farmers Home Administration's (FmHA) Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP was established by law to provide Federal employees access to counseling services to assist them in overcoming alcohol, drug abuse, and emotional problems affecting job performance.

In FY 1987, FmHA was the first USDA Agency to pilot a hotline call-in system for its field employees for EAP referrals. The hotline system was part of a consortium of Federal Agencies led by the Public Health Service (PHS) within a 17-State area of the Midwest. This system proved successful in reaching employees with personal and work-related problems, who previously had little opportunity for access to professional counseling because of their remote rural locations.

Due to the success of this program, FmHA established a second pilot hotline system for a 10-State area in FY 1988. This experimental hotline program was run directly by employees of the FmHA Personnel Division, and offered commensurate service to the PHS consortium for half the cost. This program proved to be twice as successful in reaching employees who needed counseling assistance.

Based on the success and cost benefits of the 10-State experiment, FmHA is extending this service to all of its 11,000 field employees.

Using private industry studies, FmHA expects to save three dollars for every dollar spent in costs related to alcohol, drug abuse, and emotional problems among its employees.

#### **State Employment Office Project**

As of mid-August 1988, the Forest Service adopted a process that utilizes State Employment Offices for referring candidates to be considered for field-going temporary positions. Previously, the Forest Service utilized an automated program known as the Summer/Seasonal Temporary Employment Program. Over a period of time, this system had been modified to the point that it was not responsive to the organization's changing needs and confusing to candidates seeking employment with the Forest Service.

After having been tested on 37 National Forests in 15 States, test results indicated a reduction in the numbers of declinations and no-shows; significant savings in administrative time spent in hiring temporary employees; an increase in the hiring of women and minority candidates; increased involvement of work supervisors in the process; a more timely and responsive process, plus better relationships with employment office staffs; and better matches of applicants to positions. Now, the system will be adopted throughout the Forest Service.

It is estimated that annual savings to the Agency, resulting from this new approach, may be about \$1 million.

#### **Identifying Training Needs**

Leadership and management personnel for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) often are selected from the ranks of the Agency's research scientists. This selection process guarantees the scientific and technical competence needed to credibly lead a highly complex research organization. However, professional scientific educational curriculum do not include leadership training.

In Fiscal Year 1988, an ARS task force completed an indepth study of the training needs of its research leaders—the first level of ARS management. This task force established the areas of competence required to successfully fulfill the research leadership role. A task force report, which recommended necessary training, serves as a guide for planning self-development in leadership skills. As a result, ARS anticipates the pool for selection of current and future Agency managers will increase in both breadth and depth. The task force currently is preparing a Handbook which will be a desk-top reference tool for Agency Research Leaders.

#### **Generic Training**

The Office of Personnel, Executive Development and Training Staff (EDTS), completed the implementation of its Generic Training Program. During Fiscal Year 1988, the EDTS conducted 11 pilot programs in Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights, supervision, ethics, and employee conduct, effective presentations, telephone techniques, and effective writing. A video on drug/alcohol abuse education was also produced.

A Generic Training Catalog of Courses was issued that schedules over 90 training sessions, with nearly 60 percent to be held in the field. Sessions are also being scheduled on a special request basis for locations with large numbers of employees needing the same training. The topical coverage of the Generic Training courses is based on the 24 Generic Training Modules that have been published to date. New Modules have



been developed in ADP, clerical training, leadership, and stress management.

A new EEO/Civil Rights course was developed for USDA as part of the Generic Training Program. The course targets specific training needs of USDA managers, supervisors, and employees. Instructors for the course were selected through a rigorous competitive process called "Vendor Days." The course does not just cover rules and regulations, but also includes cultural awareness and workforce diversity.

### **Meeting the Challenge of Workforce 2000**

With 46 Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) State Offices doing their own personnel hiring, recruiting a diverse workforce nationwide, which is truly representative of the labor force available, has been challenging. To answer the Secretary's call to do a better job in meeting the Agency's Equal Employment Opportunity responsibilities and to assist State Offices in modernizing their recruiting efforts, FmHA's National Office Personnel Division and the Equal Opportunity Staff jointly sponsored a cooperative effort to develop and disseminate a Recruitment Handbook for field use in 1988. This Handbook is a compendium of ideas, organizations, sources, and authorities for use to broaden the recruitment base and to reach out to potential minority/female applicants for all FmHA positions.

Additionally, State Offices were assisted in preparing their Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program Plans via the most up-to-date training technology—teleconferencing. This assistance stressed effective use of a wide variety of innovative recruiting strategies like Cooperative Education and employment programs, targeted to areas of manifest imbalance or conspicuous absence.

### **Native American/Alaska Native Study**

As a result of a Servicewide Civil Rights Committee recommendation, the Chief of the Forest Service commissioned a task force of field

employees to conduct a constituency-based study on what Forest Service's role and responsibility to this constituency is or should be.

In June 1988, at the conclusion of a 5-month study, the task force provided Chief Robertson with a report, a marketing plan, and several recommendations on how to improve our relationship with Native American/Alaskan Natives. Both the report and marketing strategies were accepted, and a State and Private Forest Management level position has been established to develop and manage a Tribal Government Program.

### **Agricultural/Biological Laboratory Technicians**

In January 1988, USDA obtained approval from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to recruit and examine for GS-4 through GS-9 Agricultural/Biological Laboratory Technician, positions for Agencies within the Department on a nationwide basis. The responsibility for implementing this program was delegated to the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) Special Examining Unit (SEU) in Beltsville, Maryland. The SEU carries out this assignment using the case-by-case examining method and KSA-based examining procedures.

Since implementation, 190 technician positions have been processed through the Unit and early feedback indicates that high quality candidates have been recruited and hired. Reports also indicate that vacancies have been filled in a more timely manner. ARS continues to monitor methods of operation in these areas in an effort to streamline the process and to continue to improve quality and timeliness.

### **FOCUS Training**

The Office of Personnel (OP) has taught 29 FOCUS classes to the personnel community. FOCUS is the programming language which enables users of the payroll/personnel data base to retrieve information and write management reports using that information. The FOCUS classes have been taught to the personnel community in general and also to the

training community. OP estimates that these classes have reached more than 435 people and, since the classes were "train-the-trainer" oriented, many more personnelists acquired FOCUS skills through the classes. In addition, OP sponsors, AgFUSE, a FOCUS users' group in USDA. AgFUSE members share ideas, discuss new technology, resolve problems, and work on various techniques which will help all FOCUS users.

### **Increased Cotton Classing Efficiency**

The cotton classing program of the Agricultural Marketing Service classed 14,020,000 samples from the 1987 crop. This was the largest volume the cotton offices had processed since 1981. By effective use of personnel, they were able to process this volume with a total division workforce of only 155 permanent employees. In 1981, when a comparable volume was processed, 226, or 46 percent, additional permanent workers were required to accomplish this task. This accomplishment is even more significant in view of the fact that 41 percent of the crop was classed by High Volume Instruments (HVI). HVI classing requires more attention from managers and supervisors than traditional manual classing.

### **Supervisory Positions Upgraded**

Of major significance to the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), this past year, was the upgrading of over 600 County Office Supervisor positions in FmHA County Offices throughout rural America. This achievement significantly enhanced the Agency's ability to retain quality employees in key field positions.

The new GS-475, Agriculture Management Specialist series, is a single-agency position classification standard designed expressly for use in FmHA. The culmination of 6 years of research, planning, and writing, in coordination with the USDA Office of Personnel and OPM, resulted in FmHA being successful in obtaining increased recognition for the key role its County Office Supervisors play to improve the economic well-being and the quality of life of America's farmers and rural residents. In approximately

30 percent of FmHA County Offices, the local economic, environmental and agricultural conditions were found to pose the most difficult challenges and opportunities, warranting an upgrade of the County Supervisor position.

### **Workforce 1995: Strength Through Diversity**

During Fiscal Year 1988, the Forest Service again underscored its commitment and support for workforce diversification. Chief Robertson spearheaded a Servicewide initiative which established the year 1995 as a bench mark goal for diversifying the Agency's workforce.

A brochure entitled "Workforce 1995: Strength Through Diversity" and a video of the Chief stating his support for Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights was provided to all employees. Subsequently, the brochure and the Chief's EEO message have become the centerpiece for multiple activities promoting workforce diversification. This major initiative focuses on the five emphasis areas of: recruitment, retention, upward movement, organizational culture, and public awareness. This initiative has evolved into a major thrust toward meeting the Agency's EEO/Civil Rights mission.

### **Personnel Action Request System (PARS)**

In 1987 alone, the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) Personnel Division processed nearly 14,000 personnel actions—all triggered by a request from the supervisor (e.g., Standard Form 52), along with a position description, and related documents. The amount of data elements wrapped up in *all* of the personnel action requests submitted annually can vary between 50.5 million and 154.7 million, depending upon the specific nature/extent of each individual request. This takes a lot of paper and time!

PARS was conceived by ARS to reduce the amount of time, procedures, and paper needed to request official personnel actions. This is significant in terms of potential savings of time and effort on the many requests that yearly flow into the Agency's Personnel Division.

PARS provides system access for all organizational levels of "users" within ARS—Research Units at over 120 locations, Research Centers, Areas, Headquarters Staffs/Divisions, and the Personnel Division itself. Some of these "users" will also be reviewers, approving officials, and receivers of SF-52s, and related documents. Key features of PARS are as follows:

- request indicates action being requested; PARS fills in data from other automated sources; system provides access to many preapproved position descriptions for use as is, or for modification; and PARS prompts the requester for needed information.
- electronic routing for management approvals is based upon whether or not the action exists within the unit's current Annual Resource Management Plan (which is, itself, the result of an automated planning and documentation system existent throughout ARS for the past several years).
- users can "see" action status at any stage.
- interfacing with other automated systems within ARS' administrative management organization in order to share needed information on departing employees, etc.
- interfacing with the National Finance Center's (NFC) Personnel Remote Entry System in order to electronically transmit completed requests for personnel action directly to the NFC database, thus, avoiding reentry of necessary data.
- minimal hardware change for users, plus a mix of "on-line" and "off-line" activity to keep telecommunications costs as low as possible.

The benefits obtained from PARS are:

- it minimizes keystrokes in data entry by interface with other systems having relevant data;

- it reduces consumption of paper and forms;
- it reduces surface mailing time, costs, and misroutings; and
- it reduces time (and procedure) for Research Leaders and location support in composing, reviewing, approving, and effecting personnel and position actions.

### **Productivity Improvement**

#### **Productivity and Quality Management**

The implementing guidelines for the Productivity Improvement Program (PIP) are set forth in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-132, "Federal Productivity and Quality Improvement in Service Delivery," which was issued April 22, 1988. The Circular elevates the importance of quality and timeliness in the PIP, discusses the relationship of the PIP to the A-76 contracting of commercial activities, and sets reporting guidelines for agencies.

USDA's strategy for implementing PIP has expanded greatly since its inception. The USDA-wide productivity and quality improvement program incorporates the ten practices considered essential to productivity and quality management. These practices include:

- (1) Top-level support and commitment;
- (2) A customer orientation;
- (3) Written productivity and quality goals and an annual improvement plan;
- (4) Productivity and quality measures and standards that are meaningful to agency programs;
- (5) Use of the improvement plan and measurement system to hold managers and employees accountable;
- (6) Employee involvement in productivity and quality improvement efforts;
- (7) Rewards for quality and productivity achievement;



- (8) Training in methods for improving productivity and quality;
- (9) Retraining and placement of employees affected by improvement efforts; and
- (10) Reducing barriers to productivity and quality improvement.

USDA now has 15 functions in the Governmentwide PIP. These functions are: Meat and Poultry Inspections (Food Safety and Inspection Service); Agriculture Quarantine Inspections (Animal Plant Health and Inspection Service) (APHIS); County Office Operations (Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service); Library Services (National Agricultural Library); Region One and Region Nine (Forest Service); Soil Surveys (Soil Conservation Service); Brucellosis, Import/Export, Animal Health Compliance and Enforcement (APHIS), Federal Grain Inspection Service; Food Stamp Compliance Investigations (Food and Nutrition Service); Meat and Poultry Grading (Agricultural Marketing Service); and Business and Industrial Loans (Farmers Home Administration).

The 1990 Productivity Plans have been submitted to OMB for Cotton Classing, Dairy Inspection; Very Low Income Housing Repair Loans and Grants (Section 504), Multi-Family Housing Loans, Subsidized and Unsubsidized (Section 515); Veterinary Biologics and Veterinary Diagnostics. USDA has committed these programs to the goals of PIP and progress is being tracked. By 1991, USDA should have 64 program functions, representing 67,000 FTEs included in the PIP inventory.

Even though some USDA Agency activities are not appropriate for inclusion in PIP, each Agency, regardless of its mission, must look at ways to improve its overall productivity and report these initiatives to top management. Agencies are encouraged to look for better ways to conduct business and take credit for their innovative ideas and share them with other Agencies. Successful productivity initiatives are published in PIP Newsletter to ensure that

Agencies and their personnel get recognition for quality work. Agency Heads are also encouraged to reward employees for their commitment to PIP.

### **Review and Certification of State Meat and Poultry Inspection Programs**

The Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act permit the Secretary of Agriculture to cooperate with a State in developing and administering an inspection program which is at least equal to the requirements contained in the Acts. At present, 27 States maintain their own inspection programs. If a State fails to maintain its inspection program, the Acts require that USDA assume responsibility for the State program. Previously, in order to ensure maintenance, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) established a quarterly review and rating system to determine that the "at least equal to" status of a State's program was maintained. The system focused on inspection activities at the plant level and served well in helping States develop and maintain an effective inspection program. However, the system was cumbersome, costly, and, in light of the sophistication of today's State inspection programs, no longer necessary.

A new comprehensive annual State certification program has been established to measure activities outside of plants, as well as in plants, that will assure the State inspection program is at least equal to the requirements in the Acts. The system: (1) defines nine items that are required of the State program; (2) requires the State to develop a plan of action for complying with the nine items; and (3) establishes oversight activities for FSIS inspectors to ensure that the State program is maintained at least equal to the requirements in the Acts. This new system reduces the burden on FSIS to perform quarterly reviews by field supervisors that were time consuming and costly.

### **Colocation of Field Offices**

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is collocating 24 of its field offices in six major cities across the country. This effort is being

undertaken to provide more efficient use of personnel, equipment, and office space. The collocated offices will enable the Administrator and immediate staff to effectively establish and maintain face-to-face contact with managers, supervisors, and employees. At the same time, this will enhance the ability of the AMS commodity programs to coordinate efforts and share resources. Industry representatives will be able to access most Agency functions at one location in each of the major cities.

### **Unnecessary Payment Booklets**

In December 1987, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) Finance Office implemented major changes in the way it generates replenishment payment booklets for its 906,733 single family housing borrowers. The FmHA system automatically generates replenishment booklets every 12 months. In the past, the system generated booklets in other circumstances, such as in response to borrower or field employee requests via a block checked on the payment coupons. Designed to ensure borrowers always had coupons to make loan payments, the system actually generated more booklets than were needed. In addition to the unnecessary costs, this situation caused confusion about which coupons to use. Often, booklets for the same loan had different payment amounts because of changing subsidies.

Based on the results of a detailed complex analysis of borrower accounts, the Finance Office staff determined the current method was not the best approach and proposed actions to modify how and when the payment booklets were generated. Implemented in December 1987 and January 1988, these actions included modifications to the Finance Office and Treasury lockbox bank procedures, revisions to the payment coupons, and alterations to the automated system.

A followup analysis is now under way to assess the effectiveness of the changes. Estimates are that they will save FmHA about \$468,000 annually in materials, postage, and time. In

addition, the changes improved public relations with borrowers by reducing the number of unnecessary, often incorrect, booklets sent to them.

### Organizing for the Food Security Act

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) has its work cut out for it. As the Federal Agency responsible for providing technical assistance to private landowners in the planning and application of conservation systems, SCS has always taken pride in providing conservation plans for everyone who wanted one. Now, SCS must provide conservation plans for everyone who needs one.

Under the Food Security Act (FSA) of 1985, all farmers, who produce agricultural commodities on fields designated as highly erodible land (HEL), will need a conservation plan by 1990 if they are to continue receiving program benefits. As a prerequisite to developing the needed conservation plans, SCS must help notify the affected farmers and determine which land is HEL. The result is a formidable increase in the SCS workload. In Kansas, for example, the Nation's second largest cropland State, SCS estimates that more than a third of the State's 29.1 million acres of cropland is HEL.

James Habiger, SCS State Conservationist in Kansas, recognized early on that the best way to meet the increased workload would be to hire more people. No surprise there, but the lack of a large number of qualified people ready to begin work, as well as personnel ceilings, restricted this. So, he found other ways:

- Staff details from other States—ten SCS soil conservationists from Arkansas were detailed to Kansas for 60 days.
- Temporary employees—Statewide, Kansas employed 161 WAEs (When Actually Employed) at some time during Fiscal Year (FY) 1987 and hired about 60 temporary, full-time employees as soil conservationists. The appointments were for 18 months.

- Soil conservation district secretaries provided invaluable help. Most have mastered the computers so essential to recordkeeping in conservation planning and some are helping with running rods in the field and recording field notes.

A Statewide computer system was developed to track the forms completed when farmers apply for USDA program benefits. SCS and conservation districts shared the cost of putting computers in all of SCS' 105 field offices in Kansas. When this system is fully operational, SCS conservationists will be able to quickly find out where any local farm stands in its conservation planning, and what the farmer must do to remain eligible for benefits from the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), and other USDA Agencies.

Jeff Hart, SCS District Conservationist in Osage City in Eastern Kansas, has developed computer software that is being used around the State to develop Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts.

CRP is a provision of the Food Security Act that provides assistance to farmers who want to convert their HEL from crops to permanent grasses or trees.

"Each contract averages 10 pages," Hart said, "and we can print it in 3 minutes. After a landowner has signed up for the CRP, we visit the fields and enter the information into the computer. The computer does the calculations. For example, it determines what type of grass could be planted and what the cost sharing would be. When the contract is ready, we set up an appointment with the landowner to review it. We can make any changes needed and get a corrected printout almost instantly. Then we get the farmer's signature.

"Of our 270 CRP contracts, 80 had to be modified for one reason or another. Total computer time for these changes was less than an hour. Before, I would have taken a week."

At Smith Center in the Northcentral part of the State, District Conservationist Jeff Gross employs all the available methods for getting enough staff to do the job. Kelvin Trice, a soil conservationist, was detailed from Arkansas for a month to help out with HEL determinations. Le Ann Woods, a WAE employee, also makes HEL determinations. A conservation district employee and a summer worker load the data into CAMPS, the Agency's Computer Assisted Management and Planning System, which Gross then uses to prepare conservation plans.

Robert Hankrader, SCS District Conservationist at Kinsley in Southwestern Kansas, tells how he has kept on top of the FSA paperwork. "We got requests for determinations from ASCS in November 1986, often the same day the landowner signed up. We worked on them whenever we had some free time. We were done by mid-April." The Kinsley office has completed some 800 determinations—nearly 600 of which contained HEL. "Most of the HEL classifications are because of sandy soil," Hankrader said, "We recommend conservation tillage, wind stripcropping, and crop rotation. Less than a quarter required structural changes."

Cecil Smalley is the computer-age version of the circuit rider. From his base in the SCS area office at Manhattan, Smalley, an SCS computer assistant, helps district conservationists in 17 counties to develop conservation plans by computer. He estimates he spends 2 days a week on the road, usually visiting each field office about once a month.

With Smalley's help, Virgil Beougher, District Conservationist for Elsworth County, has completed determinations for all but 6,000 acres out of the 73,000 cropped acres in the County. About a third of the farms in the County have HEL.

To help notify all farmers of the FSA requirements, other major efforts are underway at the State level in Kansas. These include a cooperative



information program, preparation of a handbook with ASCS, and a Blue Ribbon Committee.

The Kansas State Conservation Commission is heading up a Statewide information program with conservation districts taking the lead at the county level. SCS reimburses the conservation districts for their expenses through a cooperative agreement. Information activities being considered to reach FSA-affected farmers include: holding workshops and symposia, producing written and audiovisual material, issuing newsletters, using direct mail, writing news releases and guest editorials, developing exhibits and posters, and holding field days and tours.

A Handbook was issued in May 1987 as a short version of the ASCS Handbook 6-CRP Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Provisions, and part 540

of the SCS National Manual of Assisting ASCS Cost-Sharing Programs. It is intended as a user's guide to the two Agencies and not as a replacement for the more detailed manuals.

The Blue Ribbon Committee of the Kansas Association of Conservation District (KACD) was established to provide more public participation in implementing the FSA. Membership consists of two district supervisors from each administrative area of the KACD. The ten-member Committee makes recommendations and provides guidance to conservation districts and the SCS State Conservationist for carrying out the FSA, and mediates between involved agencies and the public.

By the end of FY 1987, SCS field offices in Kansas had completed approximately 30 percent of the plans needed for conservation compliance.

They expect to complete another 40 percent in the current year.

By seeing opportunities, instead of problems, in meeting FSA goals, SCS is not only helping Kansas farmers to stay eligible for USDA farm program benefits, but is also helping them to conserve valuable soil in the second largest farmland State in the Nation.

### **National Safety and Health Conference-Workshop**

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) held an Agencywide National Safety and Health Conference-Workshop, in Chicago, Illinois, on September 19-23, 1988. The theme was "Make Safety Happen in APHIS."

The Conference was sponsored by the Agency's National Safety and Health Council. Collateral Duty Safety and Health Officers, representatives from all APHIS programs, and each of their respective regional and laboratory councils attended the Conference.

Knowledgeable speakers from APHIS, GEICO, AAA, the American Red Cross, the Department of Labor and the State of Illinois covered items such as AIDS, defensive driving courses, hazard communication, and general safety overviews.

To underscore the commitment of USDA and APHIS management to safety programs, John Franke, Assistant Secretary for Administration, and Larry Wilson, Director, Office of Finance and Management, attended the Conference. Many participants of the Conference gained new insight on safety topics of concern to APHIS. Safety consciousness was raised as new information was presented and individual questions were addressed.

### **Food Stamps Go Electronic**

The Food and Nutrition Service has awarded funds to four sites which will demonstrate the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) technology in the Food Stamp Program. Under the project, recipient households will be issued plastic, magnetic stripe cards instead of food stamp coupons. The



Cecil Smalley, an SCS area computer assistant, updates a computerized tracking system at the SCS field office in Ellsworth City, Kansas. The system enables SCS field personnel to monitor progress from farmers' requests for determination of whether they are farming highly erodible land or wetland, through the actual determinations and farmers' requests for planning assistance, to the development of conservation plans.

cards will be swiped through a point-of-sale device located at the grocery counter check-out. Benefits will be debited from the recipient's food stamp account and immediately credited to the grocer's account.

EBT was previously tested in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1984 and, with the exception of the cost of the system, all involved parties were receptive to the concept. This second round of tests is designed to determine whether the EBT concept can be applied to Food Stamp Program operations at a lower cost than the current paper coupon system.

The pilot projects are scheduled to start within the next 8 to 12 months and will run for approximately 3 years. Evaluation of the projects will help determine the potential for nationwide use of electronic funds systems instead of paper food stamp coupons. Joe Leo, Deputy Administrator for Management, believes this may be the beginning of an electronic turnpike, which both the public and private sectors can jointly develop and use.

#### **National Pilot Study Results**

After 3 years, the "National Pilot Study" in the Forest Service is yielding tremendous results. Through the elimination of red tape, unnecessary controls and inefficient procedures, a dramatic improvement in organizational productivity has occurred. The Pilot Units have increased their outputs by 18 percent.

Service to the public has improved due to less red tape and more decisions being made at the ground level. Local publics are finding the Forest Service far more responsive, e.g., the Gardener Ranger Station in the Gallatin Forest now issues range permits on-the-spot rather than sending up the line for processing and rubberstamping. Payback is a satisfied customer (public) and time saved for field workers.

In the area of quality of worklife, the Pilot Units report marked improvement in risk taking and innovation, and rewarding employees for their creativity and entrepreneurship.

Morale is on the upswing and the "Spirit" (as the Pilot Units have come to term it) is soaring. It is perhaps this increase in morale and attitude which is reflected in changes in behavior, which will ultimately have the most important long term effect on the Forest Service's effectiveness. And, by creating a climate which institutionalizes ownership and pride-of-workmanship, quality job improvement is a natural result.

Interest in the Forest Service Pilot Test has been widespread and is growing. Representatives from city, State, and Federal Agencies, private industry, and academia have visited the pilot sites to learn about how the approach works. The Chief and other top Forest Service managers have made numerous briefings to other Government Agencies. Two other Federal Agencies—the Veteran's Administration and the Bureau of Land Management—have fully adopted the Forest Service Pilot approach and have initiated Pilot Test projects of their own.

#### **Consolidated Review Program**

The Consolidated Review Program (CRP) was developed by the Office of Finance and Management (OFM), the Office of Information Resources Management (OIRM), and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to eliminate the overlap and duplication among the requirements of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circulars A-123 "Internal Control Systems," A-127 "Financial Management Systems," and A-130 "Management of Federal Information Resources." In conjunction with OIRM, OFM developed a CRP guidance package containing five limited review questionnaires and a sample of specialized review questionnaires, which presented a consolidated approach to fulfilling the requirements of the three Circulars.

REA tested the CRP early in FY 1988. Using the limited review questionnaires, three segments of REA's inventory of assessable units were reviewed: (1) Office Automation, (2) The Fiscal Accounting Division, and (3) the Independent Analysis of Generation and Transmission

Proposals. The weaknesses identified through this process were considered non-material. Based on the REA test, the CRP was found to be a viable and effective method for fulfilling the requirements of the Circulars.

In April 1988, Mr. Franke, Assistant Secretary for Administration, approved the CRP for a Departmentwide pilot. USDA Agencies are expected to begin using the CRP in FY 1989 in lieu of the separate review requirements set forth in the Circulars. To date, all USDA Agencies have been provided CRP training.

A procedure (augmenting the CRP limited review) was also developed to test financial management systems (FMS). The National Finance Center and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) are now piloting this procedure. The intermediate results of these pilots reflect that the CRP methodology and FMS approach are fulfilling the appropriate Circular requirements, and that the overall CRP process is capable of identifying material weaknesses through self-review and testing.

OMB plans to distribute the CRP guide for Governmentwide comment after the completion of the FNS pilot.

#### **U.S. Attorney Backlog**

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) has taken several initiatives to reduce the backlog of cases pending in the U.S. Attorney's offices during the past year. As of June 1988, the backlog exceeded 26,000 cases. During the year, a pilot program was begun in the Western District of Kentucky, utilizing contract investigators to provide prompt investigations adequate to meet litigation requirements of cases being pursued in the United States District Courts. Another pilot was initiated in the Western District of Oklahoma in which the Department of Justice hired an additional attorney to handle only FmHA cases, with FmHA providing the extra clerical assistance.

In addition to these two pilots, meetings were held with representatives of the Department of



Justice, the Office of Inspector General, the Office of the General Counsel, and the Office of Finance and Management to discuss other possible ways of addressing the problem. Potential avenues of relief include use of contract attorneys, further use of County Attorneys, and overall improvement in exchange of information among the agencies involved to expedite the processing of FmHA cases.

#### **Hazardous Waste Cleanup**

In Fiscal Year 1988, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) reduced or eliminated major environmental hazards at three facilities. The hazard abatement was performed in addition to meeting the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) clean air, water and hazardous waste regulations for all other Agency facilities. The hazards were accumulations of excess hazardous wastes and materials discovered during the Agencywide survey of all facilities, which is an integral part of the APHIS Hazardous Waste Management Plan. The materials were in place when the Animal Damage Control (ADC) Program was transferred from the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service to APHIS and included potentially explosive decomposed chemicals, bulk quantities of PCBs, and nearly a ton of cyanide!

The costs of cleanup would have overtaxed the operating budgets of the ADC facilities. Fortunately, John Franke, Assistant Secretary for Administration, provided funding for the cleanup activities. The major ADC hazard abatements were performed at the Denver Wildlife Research Center, Denver, Colorado, and the Pocatello Supply Depot in Pocatello, Idaho.

While APHIS was required by EPA regulations to clean facilities in the United States, the Agency was faced with a lack of regulatory guidance in a foreign country. APHIS reduced the environmental hazard posed by 1,500 gallons of PCB transformer oil at the Screwworm Fly Production Plant located in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico. Thirty-five, 55-gallon drums were overpacked into

larger 85 gallon containers and are now awaiting disposal by the Mexican Government.

#### **Reducing Firefighter Fatigue and Injury**

Wildland firefighting is hard, dangerous work. The Forest Service counters these hazards by equipping firefighters with quality tools, clothing, and other gear developed by the Technology and Development Program. This Program stresses physical fitness in reducing fatigue and injury and improving productivity. The Technology and Development Staff has worked with an orthopedic surgeon to develop a series of stretching exercises to make firefighters less susceptible to ankle, knee and back injuries. The staff has also produced a video program about firefighter fatigue. The video talks about how to better manage the fatigue-related stresses of the firefighting environment in order to maintain productivity and reduce injuries.

#### **Cooperation in Conservation Practices**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and the Land Improvement Contractors of America (LICA) was signed on October 28, 1988, by SCS Chief Wilson Scaling and LICA President James Jacobs.

The MOU establishes effective cooperation in the application of soil and water conservation practices.

To achieve more efficient application of conservation practices, LICA will encourage and sponsor training of Conservation Contractors in surveying, layout, design, and construction checking. SCS will assist with this training. The training will improve the efficiency of the contractors and the quality of the practices installed by landowners or operators. Better informed contractors will allow SCS to redirect some of its resources from layout and checkout of practices to being able to reach and assist more land users in the planning and applying of Conservation Systems.

#### **Work Process Improvements**

The Office of Advocacy and Enterprise (OAE) has made a long range commitment to implementing quality and productivity improvements. After taking instructions in work process improvement techniques, based on satisfying the needs of the Office's interim and end customers, OAE was able to see initial returns on three projects.

The first project documented a work process to formulate budgets. The documented process contains relevant information and instructions



SCS Chief Wilson Scaling and LICA President Jim Jacobs signing the agreement that marks a new level of cooperation between USDA and the private sector.



needed to develop subsequent budgets. This process will save hours during the preparation of subsequent budgets.

The second project developed mail sorting and tracking processes which solved problems from lapse time to answering, separately, multiple inquiries from the same source and on the same issue. The new process also captures data on the inquiries and expedites previously developed responses being sent.

The third project improved the selection criteria, methodology, and follow-up of the procurement assistance review process.

It is estimated that these three projects will reduce "re-work" time by 2.28 staff years.

#### **Truck Tire Pressures**

The Forest Service has issued a Technology Application Plan for nationwide application of central tire inflation/variable tire pressure (CTI/VTP) for large trucks using forest roads. The CTI/VTP technology allows truck drivers to vary tire pressure to that appropriate for the load, speed, and roadway conditions. Tests conducted by the Forest Service, the United States Army, truck and tire manufacturers have shown that tires are often overinflated and that reducing their pressure reduces damage to roads, trucks, and tires. The tests have also shown that substantial benefits accrue when the tire pressure is matched to the load, speed, and roadway conditions. Thus, when a truck is operated on a highspeed road, fairly high pressures are required, but when that truck goes on low-speed forest roads with rocks and other hazards, the tire pressure should be lowered for efficient operation. Similarly, higher pressures are required for loaded rather than empty trucks.

The application of this technology could reduce Forest Service road program costs by as much as \$20,000,000 annually. Additional benefits will accrue to timber purchasers and log truckers, such as

lower vehicle operating costs and improved health and safety for drivers.

#### **Wellness Program**

Fiscal Year (FY) 1988 was a banner year for the Farmers Home Administration's (FmHA) Wellness Program. Through the hard work of our coordinators and the National Office wellness program management team, the FmHA was recognized for its contributions to employee health and morale by receiving the Office of Personnel Management Director's Award for Outstanding Health and Fitness Programs.

Operating on a budget and relying heavily on volunteer efforts, the Wellness Coordinators nationwide sponsored health and fitness activities that reached out to employees in all of FmHA's 2,000 offices. Offering programs for stress reduction, smoking cessation, weight reduction, and physical fitness, the Program reached thousands of employees in FmHA's dispersed workforce in FY 1988. A survey of employees and feedback from managers indicate that the Wellness Program has been successful in reducing absenteeism, including a remarkable reduction in sick leave use (14 percent), improving job satisfaction, and increasing employee morale.

The Wellness Program Coordinators also led the effort last year in the Agency's participation in the "Just Say No" campaign to educate American youth against the dangers of illegal substance abuse. Through the efforts of these coordinators, thousands of individuals were reached across rural America with public service announcements carrying the "Just Say No" to drugs message. FmHA was recognized for these efforts by the Just Say No Foundation and the First Lady, Nancy Reagan.

#### **Motor Vehicle Management**

In 1985, the Department began to improve the delivery of vehicle services throughout USDA. The successes through Fiscal Year (FY) 1988 have resulted in reducing costs for such services by nearly \$33

million, with a potential further reduction of over \$20 million annually. In FY 1988, the Department

- reviewed the necessity for and closed 53 in-house vehicle repair shops in favor of using less expensive commercial repair facilities;
- reviewed the necessity for and closed 202 in-house fuel-dispensing facilities in favor of purchasing fuels from less expensive commercial facilities;
- established a task force to develop an improved organizational operating system, to define specific vehicle services requirements, and to solicit bids from private industry and the General Services Administration (GSA) for possible contracting out of vehicle services; and
- justified and received authority from GSA to approve all commercial lease authority for USDA. This authority greatly improves operations by allowing field offices to acquire vehicles, as needed, in emergency situations.

Upon completion of all these vehicle service initiatives, there will be significant improvement in motor vehicle management and reduced motor vehicle costs.

#### **International Conservation**

This past year, 185 Soil Conservation Service (SCS) specialists traveled to 35 countries to provide assistance requested by the Agency for International Development (AID), international organizations, and individual countries. Several assignments were sponsored under the Soil Management Support Services, an AID project to provide technical assistance in soil survey, soil classification, and use and management of soils in developing countries. Personnel assignments included scientific and technical exchanges, as well as attendance at many international meetings. In return, 203 officials, scientists, and

technicians, from more than 60 foreign countries, received personal consultation of tours of conservation practices in the United States.

#### **VAST**

The VAST (Vacancy Announcement System Through Telemail), implemented in 1987, was enhanced in 1988 through the addition of an electronic bulletin board in Telemail, entitled JOBS. This bulletin board lists, in skeletal form, the job vacancies in USDA for the current week, as well as for the previous 2 weeks. Anyone with access to Telemail may check the bulletin board. Readers are directed to the appropriate personnel offices or to the Departmental summary listing (composed via VAST) for details of job vacancies.

JOBS resolves the problems associated with mailing vacancy announcements, i.e., mailing delays, distribution, excess printing costs, etc. Users have been very vocal in their appreciation of JOBS.

#### **Project EAGLES**

The Forest Service paved the way in Fiscal Year (FY) 1988 to further reduce the bureaucratic workload by declaring the entire Washington Office a National Pilot Study Unit. This new initiative called for a "bottom-up" rather than a "top-down" approach of empowering individuals to suggest changes that allow them to develop ownership and pride in the organization, while improving productivity and working to their greatest potential. The objectives of Project EAGLES are:

- to create an environment for innovation and positive change;
- to utilize the full potential of all employees; and

- to develop organizational leadership styles that result in an improved management climate, quality of worklife, and level of productivity.

More than 850 proposals for testing new methods of doing business were submitted. By using flexibility, within basic policy and existing laws, Washington Office employees were offered new options for getting the job done. Examples of ideas that were tested in FY 1988 include:

- (1) Maxi-flex—gives employees greater flexibility in choosing their work schedule; and
- (2) Bankcard Test—expanding the use of bankcards to speed up requisitioning in units that have substantial purchasing needs.

The Forest Service is an Agency on the wings of positive change. Longstanding barriers to productivity have been replaced by a new and even more effective role for employees. In light of the pilot efforts, the value of risk-taking continues to attract the attention of public and private enterprise. This venture could well provide a "MODEL" for developing effective staff participation at the highest levels of the entire Federal Government.

#### **Agency-Provided Medical Care**

The Forest Service has an ongoing policy to provide medical care for injured employees, while effectively managing workers' compensation costs. New procedures which provide for treatment of certain types of injuries and illnesses, via contract with local medical care providers, have been developed and are being implemented.

Each year, many of the Forest Service's workers' compensation claims, and much of the associated costs, are generated from relatively minor injuries and illnesses. Processing workers' compensation claims is a costly and time-consuming way to provide needed medical care for these types of injuries. Agencies now have the authority to provide examination and initial treatment for injuries and illnesses which involve no lost time and little, or no, followup treatment. This may be provided through agency health units or via contract with local hospitals or other medical care providers. Although these cases must be properly documented, no claim must be submitted to the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP), unless further treatment is required, or the employee loses time from work.

Procedures developed by the Forest Service were used very successfully this past summer on the large fires occurring in the Western United States. Personnel employed by the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as Forest Service employees, were treated.

Total cost savings generated, using Agency-provided medical care, have not yet been estimated. However, records show that as many as 85 percent of injuries to firefighters can be treated under these procedures. We are confident that continued use will demonstrate a decreased number of OWCP cases, reduced cost of medical care, and expedited payments to medical providers, with no reduction in employee rights or benefits.

